

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH LIEUTENANT GENERAL JAMES DUBIK,
COMMANDING GENERAL OF THE MULTINATIONAL SECURITY TRANSITION COMMAND-IRAQ (MNSTC-
I); LIEUTENANT GENERAL NASIER ABADI, VICE CHIEF, IRAQI JOINT STAFF VIA
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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): And this
is Jack. Who's joining me?

LT. COL. DANIEL WILLIAMS (Multinational Security Transition Command-
Iraq): Yes, Jack. This is Lieutenant Colonel Williams calling from the
Multinational Security Transition Command in Iraq for General Dubik and General
Abadi.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Colonel. We're online now and ready when you are.

LT. COL. WILLIAMS: Okay. I am going to put it on speaker, because
we've got all the speakers here. We'll be able to hear it and answer the
questions without having to pick up two or three different phones. MR. HOLT:
Okay. Very good.

LT. COL. WILLIAMS: All right. I'm going to put the speaker on and
then test the mike.

MR. HOLT: All right.

LT. COL. WILLIAMS: Can you hear us okay?

MR. HOLT: Yes, I believe we've got you loud and clear.

LT. COL. WILLIAMS: Super. Thank you very much. I'm going turn it
over to General Dubik and General Abadi.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Thank you, sir.

GEN. DUBIK: Jack, this is General Jim Dubik here. I don't have many
opening comments. I look forward to a set of questions that those who are
online want to ask. I've been here 90 days, so you'll have to take what I say
with a grain of salt. But General Abadi, who is the vice chief of the Iraqi
Joint Staff, has all the expertise that you would want, so I think we're set for
both of us here.

Let me turn it over to General Abadi.

GEN. ABADI: Hi. I'm General Abadi. I'm the vice chief of staff. I joined the new army in September of 2003 as an adviser to set up the air force because I'm a pilot. And then Paul Eaton -- General Paul Eaton, who headed MNSTC-I, offered me to stay on to help test-organize the new army, and I've been there ever since.

Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much, gentlemen, for joining us today for the bloggers roundtable, General Abadi and Lieutenant General James Dubik with the -- he's the commanding general -- the new commanding general of the Multinational Security Transition Command- Iraq. And thank you very much, gentlemen, for joining us.

Andrew Lubin, you're first online, so why don't you get us started again?

Q Thank you.

Yes, General Dubik and General Abadi, thank you for taking the time to speak with us. I'm Andrew Lubin from U.S. Cavalry ON Point. My question goes to General Abadi.

Sir, can you talk to us about the logistics in the new Iraqi army? From talking to some of the American generals doing the surge, there seemed to be a frustration in that there is plenty of equipment, but it is not getting to your men out in the field. Can you discuss this with us, please?

GEN. ABADI: Yes, when we first started, we started with the teeth and left the tails. This year is the year of the tail. We're trying to get the support command in place and able to reach our soldiers. We have done a lot on this. We have started a lot of technical schools to get people, efficient people, to operate.

We have -- everything was done by MNSTC-I, as you know, and this thing -- process has been transitioning from MNSTC-I to the Iraqi armed forces. It is a slow process but it is ongoing. We've got problems with being able to test these things. Because of that, we had to go back again to General Dubik and Dempsey, who helped us go on to the FMS, and we're working now on the FMS. The FMS has its own problems, but the logistics is an ongoing process. It's a success story but a slow success story.

Q Great, thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: DJ Elliott.

Yes, I've been hearing a lot of reportings about scout companies and about a soft battalion going down to Basra. I'm beginning to wonder, are the divisional scouts being expanded to recon battalions? And is that soft battalion going down to Basra -- is that a new unit?

GEN. DUBIK: Let me start with the answer. It's a bit of a mix of apples and oranges. I'll start with apples.

The division scouts and the brigade scouts inside of the coalition forces, at least the U.S., remain under the control of the brigade and division commander.

Over the last year and a half, the U.S. Army has expanded the reconnaissance capabilities of brigade combat teams in two ways. First, the number of reconnaissance assets -- physical assets, meaning human beings -- that are assigned to brigade combat teams has increased dramatically. But second and maybe even more important, those individuals are linked to a large theater-wide network, so that they can draw upon intelligence information from many sources outside of their brigade combat teams. That puts the power of national assets in the hands of brigade intelligence officers for their use and distribution within U.S. brigade combat teams.

It's a huge, huge combat multiplier for our brigade combat teams. So that's the apple part.

The orange part: the special operations forces that went to Basra are Iraqi special operations forces, highly trained, high-end special operations forces who have been in operations against extremists on both sides for a number of months, very, very proficient soldiers. And as part of the expansion, the prime minister had ordered the first expanded battalions into Basra. Heretofore they had been centrally located in Baghdad, and then we expect the Iraqi special operations to expand even beyond what we sent to Basra.

But I'll turn it over to General Abadi.

GEN. ABADI: Basra is a very important city, as you know. It's the only water outlet for Iraq, and it has all the oil in it.

We do not have enough forces there. That's why we are having a new division, the 14th Division, to be built in Basra, especially with the possibility that the British might be leaving us in time.

So the special operations are there to help our forces combat militias and secure the oil industry and the trade that we have in Basra.

MR. HOLT: Thank you, sirs.

Bruce McQuain.

Q Yes. Bruce McQuain with QandO.net. Today there's a piece in The New York Times which discusses, I guess, General Jones's assessment that's going to be coming out soon, in which he talks about the national police. And all our discussions with the folks in Iraq here have told us that locally and provincially we seem to be doing better and better with the police forces, and yet on a national level it continues to be a problem. It seems General Jones's recommendations -- and the words used in the article are that the current units be scrapped and reshaped into a smaller, more elite organization. Is that something being contemplated? And can you discuss some of the problems with the national police?

GEN. DUBIK: Well, I won't comment on General Jones's recommendation, because I think I owe him the courtesy of reading the complete report. But I can comment on behalf of the Ministry of Interior on the ongoing reforms that he has directed.

About a year ago -- maybe not quite; maybe seven, eight months ago -- the first step in the reform of the national police was taken in the establishment of a national police training center in Numaniyah. And that's the

training center now where anyone who is recruited to become a national policeman goes to train, or if formations require retraining, they go to Numaniyah for training. So that's -- first place, set up a standard training center where everyone's trained to the same level of proficiency.

Number two is examine the leadership of the national police.

Major General Hussein, who is the commanding general of the national police, has in the last four or five months taken a very, very aggressive approach to weeding out the senior leaders that he considers to be improficient. And what he has -- who he has replaced -- both of the division commanders, all nine of the brigade commanders and 17 of the 24 battalion commanders.

Now, of course on one side, this is really good. It shows and really does show his commitment to leadership in the national police that are dedicated to the country of Iraq and to eliminate sectarian leadership. Of course the other side of the coin is he had to change out that many commanders, but he has done this with the minister of Interior's backing and encouragement.

The third phase will begin in October, where each -- eight battalions, one per brigade, will be taken out of the operation areas and given special two months' worth of training done by the Italian Carabinieri police. They're setting up the training area now. The training would be for all leaders within that national police battalion, and the police in that battalion will be quote-unquote "the training aides" for the leaders as they train.

And then the last phase is to reposition the national police out of Baghdad, where they had been fixed in place since the beginning of the Baghdad Security Plan, and this, the minister of Interior believes, will give the national police a fresh start. He is also contemplating whether or not he has the -- he, the minister of Interior, and he, Major General Hussein -- whether they have the right size of national police. They believe that perhaps they had grown too large too quickly and thereby could not produce the number of qualified leaders.

So they are thinking now as they go through phase three, Carabinieri training, and then phase four, repositioning, what is the right size for the national police?

So with that -- I mean, that describes current actions. And then once General Jones' report is published, I can read and see what he had there and discuss further with General Hussein and Minister Bolani on a way ahead for the national police.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay, and Jarred Fishman.

Q Thank you, sir.

Generals, if you could speak to the issue of, what one or two or three most important things would you want the American people to recognize and to know, that you see on the ground, that they're not being able to ascertain here in the States?

GEN. DUBIK: I'll start and I know General Abadi has his own views on this one. In the last 18 months, the Iraqi army has grown by two divisions,

seven brigades and 16 battalions. When you grow that fast, regardless of what army you're in, you're going to have four problems.

Number one, you're not going to be able to produce leaders at the same rate that you can produce soldiers. It's just physically not possible. Number two, it's very hard to line up the arrival of equipment with the arrival with the leaders and the recruiting of soldiers. Number three, you can't construct bases as fast as you can construct units. And number four, especially for a country that's at war, you want to use your units as quickly as you can in the fight for your national survival. So you're not going to extend training for a year like we do in the United States before you employ your force.

These are four problems that every army would have. But they exist here, because you have here an army that is forming while it's fighting for its national survival and while the government is still developing its capacity. And what is often left out in terms of understanding in the United States is the complexity of that conjunction of problems.

This army trains in combat. It doesn't sit in a training base and wait till it's, quote-unquote, "fully trained." As soon as it gets proficient at squad and platoon level, for example, the Iraqi army squads and platoons are operating with their partner units. We don't do that in the United States and we wouldn't even think about it.

This is an army that wants to fight for its own freedom and has casualties at three times the rate of coalition forces. So I'm going to turn it over to General Abadi.

GEN. ABADI: I don't think I've got much left to say. But what I would say, something I learned when I was trying to learn English -- when work has once begun, never leave it till it's done. Be the labor great or small, do it well or not at all.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Thank you, sir.

Charlie Quidnunc. (Pause.) Charlie, are you still with us? All right. Any follow-up questions? Anything else?

Q Yes, I have one. General Abadi, Andrew Lubin from U.S. Cavalry ON Point. Sir, I spent a fair amount of time in Anbar province and was able to spend time in the outposts in Ramadi with the joint Marine and Iraqi army stations, and you have some tremendously energetic young soldiers. You have some very competent and very qualified older officers, but your NCO Corps seems to be lacking. What is the Iraqi army doing to bolster their staff NCO Corps?

GEN. ABADI: Well, General Dubik mentioned this when he was answering. We could not grow junior leaders and NCOs as fast as we had grown the armed forces. What we have done is set up four military colleges -- two in the north, one in Baghdad and one down in Nasiriyah.

The NCOs is a much bigger problem, because in the old army, we did not have NCOs, and the role of the NCOs was a different role. We had the junior officers performing the task of the NCOs. So this is a new idea for the new Iraqi army.

What we have done is tried to get as many as possible from the old NCOs, try to see the guys who are excelling in their job and giving the

commanders and the battlespace to promote these peoples into NCOs. We have opened an academy, a special academy for the NCOs. We're trying our best to shorten or make the gap smaller, but this will take time, and we're working on it.

GEN. DUBIK: Could I take a minute, Andrew, on that one?

MR. HOLT: It's a great question.

GEN. DUBIK: I don't know what your military background is. I came in the Army in 1971, and I use that date because we had to regrow the Army's NCO Corps in 1975 after the Vietnam War because we had pretty much destroyed it during that war by promoting people too quickly. And then once we took the number of casualties we did, we really didn't have a very strong NCO Corps left in 1975 when the war ended.

And what we had to do there was create a professional development program, NCO education system.

We had to revamp our personnel policies. We went to a select, then train, then promote. We couldn't promote anybody until they had the training. We went to a task, condition and standard-based, performance-oriented education system and a skill qualifications system.

Those were new organizational habits for the United States Army. And it took from 1975 to 1985 to regrow the U.S. Army NCO corps. I believe a similar thing happened in the same period in the Marine Corps. But I'm not a Marine so I can't answer that.

The expectation that I have for the Iraqi army in developing new organizational habits is the same. This is a decade-long project. And we can make some strides now, which the Iraqi army has made.

They've taken the top 10 percent of every graduating class from basic training and sent those to NCO school. They've recalled NCOs from the former army, given them retraining. They started the academies that General Abadi talked about. These are all absolutely positive steps in the right direction, but growing an NCO corps is not a monthlong deal. It's a decade-long deal.

Q You're right. You can't buy experience.

If I could follow up, when I was up in Afghanistan in April, there was talk about sending some of the Afghan staff NCOs and some of the better officers out to Okinawa or down -- back to the States. Any talk about doing that with the Iraqi army?

GEN. DUBIK: Talk, but not much yet.

Q Okay.

GEN. DUBIK: We'd like to do that. But you know, the Iraqi army's in the middle of a fight, much different than Afghanistan. Of course, Afghanistan's still fighting, but the level of intensity here still requires battlespace to be occupied with Iraqi police and Iraqi armies. We'd like to get to that point.

I don't know, sir, if you have a comment. Q General, thank you very much. It was very helpful.

MR. HOLT: All right, and --

Q Jack, this is Charlie Quidnunc at Wizbang. I had to drop off and back on. Can I ask a question?

MR. HOLT: Sure, yes, go right ahead.

Q Yes, General, I have a -- I was listening to a conference call the other day with the Pentagon where they talked about the internal affairs department of the Iraqi police, Iraqi ministry of interior. Can you talk a little bit about their internal affairs and how that will work to clean up the police?

GEN. DUBIK: Yeah, again, the ministry of interior knows that it has a sectarian leadership problem and knows that it has difficulty in purging its ranks. So the minister of interior, Minister Bolani, has set up a internal affairs organization that currently is reviewing about 1,500 files. He has already released about 2,000 employees, those employees -- some of which retired early, some of which, fired, some of whom were brought up -- criminal charges.

He's also changed out about 30 of his senior leaders and about -- I mean, very senior leaders -- and has been on the reform of the national police program that I outlined earlier in changing out the leadership of the national police. So he's very aggressive. He knows he has to do this, but he knows it's a big challenge. This is not something that's going to happen in six weeks; this is something that's going to take determined leadership over time by the set of leaders and the Ministry of Interior.

He's had, by the way, over -- almost a dozen assassination attempts on his life. So this is serious business, and he's at it, and he's not giving up on it. That's not to say it's going to be easy. I expect he'll have many more investigations to conduct, and I expect that this is not a problem that will go away in any near term.

Q And could you just go briefly through the training numbers -- how many people are being trained in the police and the army (from the border or anything -- ?)

GEN. DUBIK: Can I answer a different question of whether I want to answer it instead of that? (Laughter.) Because that's -- it's -- the specific number that you're interested in is 392,000 that we have trained in army and in police since MNSTC-I has started, but that's really -- that's not a number that has much utility, because some of those we trained are -- have attrited out of the force and others not.

The real issue is, is the Iraqi army and police force growing at a rate that ultimately it will be able to handle the security situation in the country? And an associated question: Is the army, especially the army and the police, growing in quality that it is continuing to increase its confidence in itself to do the job? And I think personally the answer to both of those questions is yes, but the partnership with coalition forces still remains important to the overall confidence level of the Iraqi police and army. Having us here gives them confidence. And until they gain more confidence in themselves and their

capabilities, our partnership remains important. But that's my opinion. I'll give you to General Abadi, who has got a much more formed opinion.

GEN. ABADI: (Laughs.) I will not differ.

We -- in 2004, we think we have around 36,000. 2004, we had just under 100. 2006, we had about 130, and now we're close to 170,000. And we're still growing. This is force generation, depending on where we want to be, what the threat is. That's how we're expanding. And we're expanding at a very, very fast rate. That's why the junior leadership cannot go, and the support command cannot cope up with this expansion.

Q Could I ask a quick follow-up? About how many total battalions and brigades are there right now today in the Iraqi army?

GEN. ABADI: We have 125 and we're still to grow 37.

Q 125 battalions with another 37 battalions planned?

GEN. ABADI: Yes.

Q Great, thank you, sir.

GEN. DUBIK: Hey, John, let me answer another part of the question that you didn't ask though that I think is pretty important. It's not just growing the teeth of the army. There's two other parts of the growth.

The tail, that General Abadi talked about earlier, also must grow. We made a conscious decision in growing the Iraqi army to grow the teeth first, because there is a war on, and we understood that the teeth could slave off of coalition forces' logistics and maintenance for a while while we grew it. Well, now we've got to change that and we are in the process of doing that.

The second: While -- when you grow an army as fast as this one has grown, you also have to grow the capacity at the strategic level, the joint headquarters and the ministry of defense, to acquire people and things, to train people, to distribute units and individuals and equipment to sustain themselves, to fund themselves and to develop the leaders and organizations once they're in the force. These are institutional capacities that are developing at the same time that we're developing the teeth of the army.

And a couple of instances of how hard this is -- between 2005 and 2006, the minister of defense and interior spent \$2.5 billion more in '06 than they did in '05 and 2 billion, probably by the time it's over, more in '07 than it did in '06.

In addition during that period, they grew several divisions, almost a score of brigades and tens of battalions. This is huge growth. And when you grow something this fast, you -- I mean, you generally have difficulty with organizational processes, bureaucracies, precision. It's very similar to the growth that we went through in World War II. You know, we went from zero to 60 in three seconds between 1939 and 1943, and it showed. Well, it's the same thing here. They went from zero to 60 in three seconds, and there's all kinds of problems, but they're problems we want to have, and we're glad to have them.

GEN. ABADI: If I might add, the mission of the armed forces was to destroy the enemy, to stop their line of communications and supply and deny them

safe havens. And no one mentioned that we had another mission that was given to us was to safeguard the infrastructure, the oil and electricity, and this is a very, very big part, knowing the number of kilometers that the pipelines go through and the number of electrical high-tension wires that we have. This has also been a task given to the armed forces, and we have 17 SIBs, strategic infrastructure battalion, performing that duty, and they answer to us and we have to man, train and equip them and coordinate their command and control system.

Plus, to all do this -- we're always talking army, army, army. We are growing an air force. We are growing an air force, and the air force that we have grown has been able, as we're beginning now, to provide surveillance, ISR, to provide transportation and especially for infrastructure that we have.

The navy has been safeguarding the waterways and the two -- what do you call them?

GEN. DUBIK: Oil platforms.

GEN. ABADI: -- oil platforms that we have down south. We had an incident the other day in Karbala, and one vital role was the air force caravans flying over and the helicopters, Huey Helicopters patrolling the roads, providing security and providing us with information that -- whether things are happening or things are not happening, because things are magnified. We get calls -- this is happening, there's a big fight there -- and they have been very, very helpful in bringing back peace back to Karbala.

Q Quick follow-up, General Abadi. Could you speak in that infrastructure protection battalion, the new concerned citizens? I'm not sure if you understand, but in English, that's what they're calling them, the old 1920s Revolutionary Brigades, the insurgents being brought into these concerned citizens units.

GEN. ABADI: That was in the good old days. (Laughs.) That was the past. These SIBs were formed on a very long basis by local people, tribal people who did not have any equipment, anything; they just got paid. We reorganized, rethought. The focus came from the corps and from MNF-I and then from MNSTC-I to support those SIBs, and we rethought everything. The SIBs -- the latest for the SIBs -- the SIBs now will be, instead of calling them "SIBs," they will be -- what do you call them? -- LIBs, live infantry battalions.

They are going now to training, and as they train, they will be equipped and they will be army battalions and no more SIBs; they will be LIBs.

GEN. DUBIK: Charlie, did you -- is that you that asked that question?

MR. HOLT: I think that was Jarred.

Q It's Jarred.

GEN. DUBIK: Oh, okay. Jarred, if I could use my apples and oranges a little bit on this one -- as a result of the offensive -- the success of offensive operations -- in the wake of those, a number of citizens have come forward to become policemen. And sometimes in the United States news, they're called arming the tribes, they're called local concerned citizens and any number of other names. But in fact the minister of Interior has put these people, many of them, on hiring orders as policemen. They're vetted at the national level by

the prime minister's Reconciliation Committee, they're hired by the minister of Interior and then trained according to a program of instruction that the minister of Interior has published. And then they're hired as policemen ultimately to be scheduled for a police academy later on.

So I wanted to make sure that -- because we had two things going here -- that we also -- local tribes protecting infrastructure, that, as General Abadi said, have now -- are going to be in the army officially trained as light infantry battalions, but there's also some people called local concerned citizens who are joining the police force.

Hey, look, Jack, I really would like to do this for another 10 minutes, but I've got to promote Brigadier General Mike Jones to Major General Mike Jones, and his wife is on a video feed from the Pentagon, so I don't mind making Mike wait, but I'm not going to let his wife wait. (Laughter.)

MR. HOLT: Well, sir, we do appreciate you being here, and this has been a fascinating conversation. I hope -- and we look forward to the chance to speak with you again. Lieutenant General James Dubik, the commanding general of the Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq, and also General Abadi from -- the vice chief of staff of the Iraq Joint Staff, thank you very much, gentlemen, for being with us. GEN. DUBIK: You're welcome. Thank you, sir.

Q Thank you. Thank you both very much.

GEN. DUBIK: Thank you.

END.